

Ray chosen by Rob chosen

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It was not so much the fact of Dad's death that has left us so shocked as he had after all reached a great age but the manner of his passing has left us feeling, if you take away the emotion, much as you would if you were reading a really good book and someone has snatched it away from you before you have been able to read the last chapter.

For every generation people's lives are buffeted by events occurring which are outside their control in Dad's case the seismic events of the Second World War left an indelible mark on him for the rest of his life. Dad's exploits during the War and his distinguished service have been well documented and much discussed over the last few years so I don't propose to go in to detail now. I don't say this to make light of Dad's service, because without his actions then, and those of his friends and colleagues at the time, none of the rest of us would be here to enjoy the great privilege of living in a free society.

What I would say is that here was a young man, a boy in fact of 17 years at the outbreak of War who volunteered for the RAF as he had already learned to fly but was too young to go directly into service so he volunteered as an ambulance driver and found himself trying to save the lives of people in Coventry in November 1940 when it was blitzed by German Bombers. Many of you know that Dad went on to fly Halifax bombers as a flight engineer/second pilot but was shot down in 1943, the crew landing a burning aircraft in a field, eventually he was captured and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

All these things happened over a period of about 6 years in a life of nearly 90 years and before my sister or I were born so I would like to speak about the achievements of the man I knew. A brilliant engineer. Was this man perfect? No. Did we always get on with each other when I was younger? Definitely not! Was this always his fault? Of course not! Dad could be awkward, stubborn and I suspect occasionally annoyed by my inadequacies. He was though always willing to have another go at getting me to understand things which must have seemed simple to him but were challenging for me. Dad had no interest in money which he saw only as a means of exchange. This and his reluctance to part with anything that "might just come in handy" I think stem directly from his extraordinary early experiences as a POW when preserving his life and those of his friends were his primary focus. One of Dads greatest post war achievements was to meet and marry Mum and then manage a successful,

loving marriage lasting nearly 64 years. Dad always worked hard to make sure that Mum and we had a safe and comfortable home and if we needed anything that he could not afford, well, Dad would just make it.

When I was about 4 or 5 years old and my friends had pedal cars I didn't have a pedal car I had a pedal train because Dad had made a replica steam engine which I could sit in and drive and which was the envy of kids for miles around. That pedal steam engine still exists some 55 years later and is doing service for yet another generation of young children.

By the time I was 9 I was very keen on boy's comics particularly the Lion and the Eagle. In the Lion there was a character called Paddy Payne Fighter Ace. Paddy of course flew a Spitfire and every week he would shoot down a good half dozen Messerschmitt 109s or Focke Wulfs and I confess to having had just a slight tinge of disappointment that Paddy was a gallant flying ace and, yes my dad had been there but he had been flying Bombers and horror of horrors, he was shot down. Later, the truth hit me. I realized that in Paddy's War, he must have shot down at least 1,800 German fighters, was never injured and no one was killed. In Reg Cleavers War you were largely defenceless against relentless enemy attack and nearly everyone was killed. Paddy was brave because he was a fictional character Reg was, \_\_ well just brave.

I have already said that Dad wasn't perfect and in two areas he could be regarded as being decidedly lacking. When discussing cooking and my father the name Jamie Oliver doesn't spring immediately to mind so it was just as well that Mum was a really accomplished cook. If it hadn't been for her I think we might have all starved to death. The second area was business. I think that there will be many people here in Brinklow and perhaps a few here today who will have produced for Dad some broken thing which was impossible to mend and Dad would have mended anyway with an ingenious and wonderful piece of precision engineering and then charged them only the cost of the stainless steel bolts he had bought in order to screw it back together again. It always seemed to me that there was nothing he couldn't do. Dad once owned a classic Singer sports car which he entered for the RAC classic Rally with me as co driver. Our intention was to win our class but disaster struck in Nottingham City Centre when a half shaft broke. For most people this would have spelt the end of the rally as parts were unobtainable. Not for Dad, he had made a replica

and brought it with him. So we stripped the axle replaced the part and made it to the checkpoint in time to qualify last in class. In my view a complete victory for engineering brilliance and staying power.

Many of the things Dad achieved in his post war career are not well known so I hope you will forgive me for mentioning some of them now. Dad was always excited by cutting edge research and problem solving so after returning to Coventry he went into the small team of people engaged in rocket research. The technology developed by Dad and his colleagues on the Black Knight and Blue Streak rockets led directly to the American Apollo space programme which, using larger versions of the engine developed by his team took the first men to the moon in 1969. At the beginning of the 1960's Dad went to Harry Ferguson Research in Coventry. Some of you may have heard of the clever automotive solutions that emerged from that company, produced by a small team of engineers led by Dad. One of these was a racing car called the Ferguson P99. That 4 wheel drive car developed by the team at Ferguson was so advanced that the Formula 1 governing body banned it but not before Stirling Moss had driven it to victory at Oulton Park. Most people will remember an iconic car the Jensen Interceptor FF with a four wheel drive system developed by guess who. Even small cars these days have ABS breaking systems but if you go back into the research which produced that system the name Reg Cleaver will be etched into it like a stick of Blackpool Rock.

After Dad retired in the early 1980s he acted as a special advisor to many engineering concerns and was well known in that field, one day he was contacted by BMW who had some five years earlier recovered their works 1939 TT Winning racing motorcycle. The machine had been sent to four different organisations for restoration and each had failed miserably even doing more damage to what was by then only a partially complete wreck. BMW entrusted it to Dad asking only if he could piece it together to be a static exhibit in their museum as they had given up any idea of making it work. Dad agreed to rebuild it which he did by making all the missing parts from scratch and then went further by restoring it to full racing condition allowing the original race winner, Georg Meier, by then 80 years old to return with it to the 1989 classic TT where he raced it one more time before returning it in full working order to BMW's museum. Georg remarked to Dad afterwards that he

thought the bike was faster and handled better than it had done when he first raced it in 1939

Dad was a natural sportsman and managed all ball sports with ease in fact only a couple of years ago he had joined Rugby Bowling Club and had become an enthusiastic member. It was always my ambition to be able to beat him at least once which I eventually did playing him at squash. A minor detail of my victory being that when I did so he was 64 years old and was suffering from a bad knee!

Dad could always see the lighter side of situations but he often made us laugh the most when he wasn't trying to be funny. A running Joke in the family has been Dads inexhaustible supply of quick drying black paint. It seems as though this paint has been suitable for all circumstances for as long as I can remember the only slight drawback being that if you applied this paint in the middle of summer and had a three week hot spell afterwards it would set back to a beautiful gloss finish but with a surface adhesion somewhat akin to that of a brand new flypaper. You can imagine my horror when in a gesture of great affection Dad decided to paint the sidecar frame of my motorbike on the night before my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. In a different life if he had been running John Lewis partnership Dad would have changed its motto to never knowingly underengineered! He could never quite understand the very different standards applied in buildings and there are many examples in Moat House of building repairs done by Dad which will definitely last much longer than the structure that they have been fixed to.

At one time I might have said that Dad was not a particularly emotional man nor well suited to directly care for someone but his great loyalty dedication and compassion in looking after Mum when she became unwell has proven me wrong in every respect. Yet even in this area Dad managed to be extraordinary, one day when visiting the surgery to collect supplies for Mum, Dad noticed an appeal for the Alzheimers Society who were looking for people to do something enterprising to raise money for the cause. Amongst the whist drives, coffee mornings and baking challenges there was one thing which caught his eye and so it was that in his 88<sup>th</sup> year Dad performed a sponsored sky dive from 13,000 feet to the complete astonishment of everyone who saw it including me.

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I am very proud to be able to say this brave, clever, funny, caring man was my father.

What I would say is that here was a young media boy in fact at 17 years of age the outbreak of War who volunteered for the RAF as he had already learned to fly but was too young to be a pilot so he volunteered as an engine fitter. He was sent to Germany in November 1940 where he was killed by German bombers. Many of you know that Dad went on to fly fighter bombers as a flight engineer/second pilot but was shot down in 1943, the crew landing a burning aircraft in a field eventually he was captured and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

All these things happened over a period of about 5 years in a life of nearly 60 years and before me after of 7 years born so I would like to speak about the achievements of the man I know. Dad was a man who was not perfect? No. Did we always get on with each other, when was I angry with Dad? In War this always happened as he was not always what you would call a perfect father. I suspect occasionally annoyed by his own parents. He was though always willing to have another go at getting me to understand things which must have seemed simple to him but was complicated for me. Dad had no interest in money which he saw only as a means of exchange. This and his reluctance to part with anything that "might not come in handy". I think stem directly from his extraordinary early experiences as a POW when power and wealth and those of his friends were his primary needs. One of Dad's greatest personal achievements was to meet and marry Mum and then manage a successful